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ABSTRACT

Noting that because parents are generally the most important influences in a child's developmental process, and that some studies have suggested that self-concept is related to loneliness, a study focused on the understanding of loneliness in child-parent interactions. It was hypothesized: (1) that individual dimensions of self-disclosure and disclosiveness are negatively related to loneliness; and (2) that linear composites of self-disclosure factors and general disclosiveness are negatively related to loneliness. Respondents, 595 students in basic communications courses at an eastern university, completed questionnaires concerning self-disclosure, general disclosiveness, and loneliness. Half the questionnaires asked students to report self-disclosure to the mother or female guardian, the other half to the father or male guardian. Results indicated that all self-disclosure and disclosiveness factors were negatively related to loneliness. Stepwise regression showed that positive disclosiveness, honesty of disclosiveness, depth of disclosure, and amount of disclosure were uniquely related to loneliness scores. A series of multiple regressions revealed nonlinear trends for depth of self-disclosure and depth of disclosiveness in relationship to loneliness. More loneliness was significant and negatively related to the child's self-disclosure. In child-parent combinations, son-father, daughter-father, and daughter-mother disclosure relationships were all significantly different in loneliness scores. (Four pages of references and three tables are included.) (JC)

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Child to Parent Disclosure, General-Disclosiveness, and Loneliness

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Abstract

This study proposed a two-concept model of loneliness related to disclosure. Research has confirmed the relationship between loneliness and an individual's level of self-disclosure to parents. However, few studies have attempted to predict loneliness from an individual's general disclosiveness tendancies regarding others in general. Thus, a series of correlations and multiple regressions employing self-disclosure to parents and disclosiveness were formulated to explain an individual's level of loneliness. Results indicated that all self-disclosure and disclosiveness factors were regatively related to loneliness. Stepwise regression showed that positive disclosivemess, honesty of disclosiveness, depth of disclosure, and amount of disclosure were uniquely related to loneliness scores. Also, a series of multiple regressions with higher polynomials revealed nonlinear trends for depth of self-disclosure and depth of disclosiveness in relationship to lonaliness. In child-parent combinations, son-father, daughter-father, and daughter-mother disclosure relationships were all significantly different in !cneluness scores.

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Child to Parent Disclosure,

General-Disclosiveness, and Loneliness

An increasing amount of interest has been devoted to the problem of loneliness as related to the communication process (Jones, 1982; Spitzberg, 1980; Zakahi & Duran, 1982). Researchers believe loneliness to be a chronic problem for at least 25% of the population (Bradburn, 1969). Loneliness has been viewed as a subjective evaluation in which the number and/or quality of one's relationships is in some way deficient (Peplau & Perlman, 1979). It has been employed as a concept in explaining deficient interpersonal interaction (Russel, Peplau, and Cutrona, 1980; Russel, Peplau, and Ferguson, 1978). That is, an individual's ability to perform successfully in interpersonal interactions may be partially dependent on subjective loneliness tendencies (Jones, 1981; Zakahi & Duran, 1982).

Assuming that the child's self-concept affects performance in interpersonal relationships, it would appear that child-parent relationships are related to an individual's degree of loneliness. Several theorists maintain that child-parent interactions are the most important in determining the individual's self-concept (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). For example, Rosenberg (1979) believes that parents serve as the most important significant others in the developmental process. Self-appraisal reflects a person's perception of his parent's communication of approval or disapproval of self. Since an individual's self-concept has been related to loneliness (Goswick & Jones, 1981; Baum, 1982), examining loneliness in the context of child-parent relationships would appear to be logical.

Consequently, this study focused on the understanding of loneliness in child-parent interactions. Two communication variables which may predict an individual's level of loneliness are the individual's self-disclosure to parents and the individual's level of general disclosiveness. Although research on loneliness, self-disclosure, and disclosiveness has acculumated, theories with sufficient power to predict an individual's degree of loneliness have not yet been formulated. A fruitful area for loneliness research might be to derive a model involving loneliness, self-disclosure, and disclosiveness. The purpose of this study was to propose a two-concept model that can be used to explain an individual's level of loneliness.

Research Review

Importance of Loneliness

The importance of loneliness in communication has emerged from several converging perspectives. For example, Bell (1984) believes that loneliness is not isomorphic, but relevant to social involvement theory. According to this theorist, loneliness represents deficient levels of social involvement. Further, clinicians usually prescribe increased social involvement to those individuals suffering from loneliness. Rook and Peplau (1982) posit several strategies designed to aid lonely persons develop relationships and expand



their social networks.

Three other approaches to loneliness have been reported (Perlman & Peplau, 1982). First, Ioneliness has been hypothesized to be an outcome of deficiencies in individual's relationships with others (Weiss, 1973). Second, scholars appear to agree that loneliness may not be highly correlated with social isolation (Bell, 1984). For example, Peplau and Perlman (1982) state, "people can be alone without being lonely, or lonely in a crowd" (p.3).

Third, cognitive factors have been discovered to influence loneliness. Cutrona (1982) found support for the proposition that loneliness begins when individuals perceive a discrepancy between the kinds of social relationships they have and the kinds of relationships they desire. Also, Bell (1984) believes lonely and nonlonely persons may differ in their attributional style.

In addition, lonely persons experience several psychological discumforts in society. Hartog (1980) states that individuals suffer psychological distress from a painful yearning for others. Anderson, Horowitz, and French (1983) discovered that loneliness is associated with depression and anxiety while, Coswick and Jones (1981) believe loneliness is related to low self-esteem. Finally, Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona (1980) posit that loneliness results in psychological discomforts such as feelings of abandoment, emptiness, hopelessness, isolation, self-enclosement, life dissatisfaction, unhapppiness, awkwardness, restlessness, and boredom for individuals.

Investigators have also found behavorial links to loneliness. For example, Brennan and Auslander (1979) report that lonely persons are more likely to have adolescent truancy and behavior problems. Lynch (1977) believes that lonely persons are more susceptible to illness while, Rubenstein and Shaver (1980) state that loneliness is related to poor health and stress. Moreover, lonely persons are apparently more likely to drop out of college (Lamont, 1979), commit suicide (Newman, 1971) and abuse alcohol/drugs (Bell, 1956) than nonlonely people.

Self-disclosure and loneliness

Since loneliness is linked to deficient interpersonal interaction, communication phenomena relevant to satisfactory interpersonal interaction are important to the loneliness concept. Communication scholars believe that satisfactory interpersonal communication is virtually impossible unless communicators share themselves with others (Jourard, 1971; Wheeless, 1976). Assuming that child-parent relationships involve some amount of interpersonal communication, self-disclosure would appear to affect the development of those relationships, and ultimately the child's self concept (Beatty, Plax, & Payne, 1984). For example, Sullivan (1953) hypothesized that loneliness is related to deficit social skills caused by poor interaction with people. Consequently, children faul to develop friends with whom intimate information can be disclosed. Later in life, loneliness can result because of these failures.

As with many communication variables, self-disclosure can produce both



benefits and risks for the individual. Johnson (1972) states that the benefits and risks of self-disclosure can be determined through the concept of appropriateness. An individual's self-disclosure must be relevant to his/her relationship with the other person. In addition, self-disclosure must be appropriate to the situation. Since the development of a relationship is a gradual process (Altman & Taylor, 1973), inappropriate self-disclosure may create relational problems. Consequently, inappropriate self-disclosure is usually avoided by most people (Johnson, 1972, p. 15).

Appropriate self-disclosure has numerous benefits. Wheeless and Grotz (1977) and Wheeless (1978) discovered that appropriate self-disclosure leads to increased trust and solidarity in dvadic relationships. For example, we would expect child-parent relationships normally to increase in trust because of honest, in-depth disclosure.

Other studies have shown that appropriate self-disclosure results in uncreased liking, and often, loving (Rosenfeld, 1979). Similarly, Gilbert and Horenstein (1975) believe increased attraction can be gained through appropriate self-disclosure. In addition to improving the quality of interpersonal communication, Rosenfeld (1979) believes that appropriate self-disclosure promotes other personal benefits. First, self-alienation is decreased. Second, greater consistency between self-concept and other's concept of the individual can be gained. Third, self-concept is enhanced because of appropriate self-disclosure. Although there are risks involved in disclosure (Steele, 1975), a large number of important personal benefits including self-acceptance, feelings of security, and a greater tolerance for a wider range of behaviors from others may result from appropriate self-disclosure (Rosenfeld, 1979).

Previous research has generally supported the relationship between low self-disclosure and loneliness. For example, Sermat and Smyth (1973) reported that a large number of individuals attributed their loneliness "to difficulties or breakdowns in personal communication with other people." Also, Zakahi and Duran (1985) found a significant negative relationship between loneliness and a communication competence dimension made up of appropriate self-disclosure and other factors.

Although several studies have indicated a negative correlation between self-disclosure and loneliness, other findings have appeared to be inconsistent. For example, Berg and Peplau (1982) found that loneliness did not correlate with any of the self-disclosure measures with regard to male subjects. One of the reasons for the apparently inconsistent results is that self-disclosure often has been operationalized as a general disposition. However, self-disclosure to specific individuals should provide specific information about an individual's personality. Examining an individual's self-disclosure to parent should indicate an individual's self-concept (Rosenfeld 1979). Similarly, an individual's self-concept has been related to the individual's feeling of loneliness. Logically, an individual's self-disclosure to parent should be negatively related to the individual's degree of loneliness. For example, less disclosure should be related to an individual's feeling of loneliness. Consequently, self-disclosure to parents was employed here as a variable in the prediction of loneliness.

Disclosiveness and Loneliness



Disclosiveness is a generalized characteristic or trait of the individual representing that person's predilection to disclose self to other people in general—his or her openness (Wheeless, 1976). In comparison with self-disclosure, Wheeless (1976) stated that disclosiveness is a personal predisposition, while self-disclosure is a communication phenomenon with specific target-persons (p. 47).

Researchers employing the general trait of disclosiveness have noted the relationship between loneliness and disclosiveness. Kivett (1979) found that confidants were able to discriminate groups of low-lonely, moderate-lonely, and high-lonely senior citizens. In a univariate analysis, Zakahi (in press) reported that individuals who disclose a great deal, who have control over their disclosure, and who disclose honesty and positively will be less lonely than those who do not. Also, Perlman, Gerson, and Spinner (1978) discovered a negative relationship between loneliness and potential self-disclosure to a confidant in a sample of elderly people.

Since an individual's predisposition to disclose appears to be related to loneliness, disclosiveness would logically need to be included in any predictive model of loneliness. Thus, this study will employ disclosiveness as a communication variable in the prediction of an individual's degree of loneliness. Further, no study using both self-disclosure and disclosiveness as predictors of loneliness, has been developed. Consequently, this study attempts to predict an individual's degree of loneliness from his/her disclosure to parents and the individual's degree of disclosiveness.

Hypothesis and Research Questions

Based on the above research regarding disclosure, disclosiveness, and loneliness, we would predict that the three processes are related. Decreased disclosiveness tendancies regarding others in general should be related to some increased loneliness (Zakahi, in press). Self-disclosure to parents specifically should reflect an individual's self-concept and social development to a degree such that less disclosure would reflect more social isolation, alienation (Rosenfeld, 1979) and related loneliness. Therefore, we would predict that:

- - More generally, we would predict the following multivariate relationship:
- H: Linear composites of self-disclosure factors and general disclosiveness are negatively related to loneliness.

To better understand these relationships, we would need to know which combinations of disclosure/disclosiveness factors are the best predictors of loneliness, in the sense that they contribute unique variance. Also, we would want to know if any of these relationships are curvelinear. To these ends we asked:



- R: Which disclosure/disclosiveness factors are the best unique predictors 1 of loneliness?
- R: Are any disclosure/disclosiveness factors related to loneliness in a curvelinear fashion?

A final area of concern in this study involved the child's disclosure in child-parent relationships. The post-adolescence relationship should probably reflect the result of the developmental history regarding the child's disclosure to parents. This result would be reflected in current self-disclosure levels with parents (Doster & Strickland, 1969; Jourard, 1964). How disclosure levels by children to parents are related to loneliness was addressed to some extent in the above hypotheses and questions. However, previous research (Cozby, 1973; Jourard, 1971) has indicated that sons and daughters disclose differentially to fathers and mothers. Therefore, we wanted to answer the following question:

R: Is the relationship between child's self-disclosure to parent and the child's loneliness, different among different child-parent pairings (i.e., son-father, son-mother, daughter-father, daughter-mother)?

METHOD

Respondents (N=55) in the study were students in basic communication courses at a comprehensive eastern university. A survey questionnaire was distributed, completed in class and returned to the section-instructor. The survey requested demographic information and completion of a self-disclosure scale, a general disclosiveness scale, and a loneliness scale. Half the booklets instructed respondents to report self-disclosure to mother or female guardian; the other half, father or male guardian. Booklets with these different instructions were systematically randomized prior to distribution. General disclosiveness instructions in all booklets asked respondents to complete the scale items based upon how they communicate with other people in general.

Measurement and Analysis

Categorical data for sex of parent/guardian were produced through random assignment of booklets. Sex of respondent was obtained in the demographic section of the questionnaire. Self-disclosure to parent and general disclosiveness were each measured with 31-item, Likert-type scales developed by Wheeless (1978). Factor structures were rechecked through principle factor analysis with iteration and oblique rotation (Promax). Consistent with previous research, five factor solutions were extracted for each scale, with only the first item of each scale failing to load sufficiently (Wheeless, 1978). That item was dropped to increase the reliability of the consciously-intended-disclosure factor. Internal reliabilities of the self-disclosure (to parents) factors were the following: intended disclosure—.73, amount= .79, positiveness= .86, depth= .73, and honesty= .80. Internal reliabilities of the general disclosiveness (to others in general) factors



were the following: intended disclosiveness= .82 amount= .80, positiveness= .88, depth= .79, and honesty= .78.

Ioneliness was measured with the 20-item, Revised UCIA Ioneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980). Unrotated principle components analysis reconfirmed its single-factor structure. The measure had an internal reliability of .87.

Research questions and hypotheses were analyzed with Pearson product-moment correlations, Multiple R's, multiple linear regressions, and multiple regression with higher-order polynomials — first-order quadratic and second-order cubic functions. The .05 level of significance was required for statistical tests.

RESULTS

Pearson product-moment correlations among the variables in the study revealed that all self-disclosure and disclosiveness factors were negatively related to loneliness (See Table 1). While all these coefficients were significant, slight to low correlations were detected. Depth and positiveness of self-disclosure, as well as positiveness and honesty of general disclosiveness, were the highest correlates of loneliness. Correlations among disclosure factors indicated potential colinearity, particularly between corresponding self-disclosure and general disclosiveness dimensions.

Table 1 about here

Self-disclosure factors were entered into a multiple regression in the order of the magnitude of their correlations with loneliness. The significant over-all model (F=15.15, d.f.= 5/589, p<0001) produced a multiple R of .34, accounting for slightly over ll% of the shared variance with loneliness. Depth (F= 36.50, p<0001), positiveness (F=26.30, p<0001), honesty (F=5.18, p<.0232), and amount (F=6.55, p<:0107) of self-disclosure were significant predictors in the sequential model (Type I SS). Each also contibuted to significant unique variance (Type III SS) in loneliness. The intended disclosure factor was not significant.

General disclosiveness factors were entered into multiple regression in the order of the magnitude of their correlations with loneliness. The significant over-all model (F=19.07, d.f.= 5/589, p<.0001) produced a multiple R of .37, accounting for almost 14% of the shared variance with loneliness. Positiveness (F=60.48, p<.0001), honesty (F=17.86, p<.0001) and amount (F=16.46, p<.0001) of disclosiveness were significant predictors in the sequential model (Type I SS). Each also contributed to significant unique variance (Type III SS) in loneliness. The depth and intended disclosiveness factors were not significant in either model.

To further assess the contributors of self-disclosure and disclosiveness factors to variance in loneliness, both sets of variables were entered into a multiple regression analysis. However, because of the problem of substantial multiple colinearity between corresponding self-disclosure and disclosiveness



factors (See Table 1), step-wise multiple regression (Maximum R-square improvement) was used. A resulting, parsimonious four-variable model (F=27.25, d.f.= 4/590, p<.0001 produced a multiple R of .39, accounting for over 15% of the variance in loneliness. The four significant predictors in the model (Type II SS) were positive disclosiveness (F=32.41, p<.0001), honesty of disclosiveness (F= 12.10, p<.0005), depth of self-discosure (F= 7.47, p<.0064), and amount of self-disclosure (F=7.80, p<.0054).

A series of multiple regressions with higher polynomials for each disclosure/disclosiveness factor revealed only two nonlinear trends. Both depth of self-disclosure (F=16.98, d.f.= 3/591, p<.0001, R=.28) and depth of general disclosiveness (F=10.62, d.f.= 3/591, p<.0001, R=.23) displayed significant linear and nonlinear relationships with loneliness. Depth of self-disclosure shared variance with loneliness in linear (F= 35.25, p<.0001, r = .05, r = -.23), quadratic (F= 7.63, β <.0059, γ^2 = .01, γ = .11), and cubic (F = 8.06, p<.0047, y^2 = .01, y = .11) relationships. Depth of disclosiveness shared variance with loneliness in linear (F=12.84, p<.0004, r = .02, r=-.14), quadratic (14.37, p<.0002, $\eta^2=.02$, $\eta=.15$), and cubic (F=4.66, p<.0314, $\eta^2=.01$, $\eta=.09$) relationships. Graphic representation of the nonlinear relationships of these two factors with loneliness are displayed in in Table 2. Further, when self-disclosure depth (28 levels) and disclosiveness depth (29 levels) were entered into multiple regression to allow for nonlinearity (GIM, ANOVA model), the combined highest possible nonlinear association of the two variables with loneliness was 19% (F=2.32, d.f. = 55/539, p<.0001).

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Multiple R's derived from multiple regressions including all self-disclosure factors were used to analyze (1) son (male respondent) and father (male guardian), (2) daughter (female respondent) and father (male guardian), (3) son (male respondent) and mother (female guardian), and (4) daughter (female respondent) and mother (female guardian). Likewise, multiple R's from stepwise multiple regression, including only significant predictors, were conducted (See Table 3). Although the child's self-disclosure was significantly, negatively related to loneliness for all child-parent combinations, multiple R's among son-father, daughter-father, and daughter-mother relationships were significantly different (Z's > 1.96). Also, R's for son-father and daughter-mother disclosure relationships differed.

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DISCUSSION

The results of this study appear to confirm relationships among self-disclosure to parents, general disclosureness, and an individual's



level of loneliness. All self-disclosure and disclosiveness factors were negatively related to loneliness. These results would appear to indicate that more lonely individuals may have less self-disclosure to parents and exhibit less disclosiveness to others in general than nonlonely people. Similarly, individuals who disclose more highly to parents and exhibit higher disclosiveness to other individuals may be less lonely. However, the correlations were slight to low. Since reliabilities were less than desired, these correlations probably indicated meaningful, and at best, moderate relationships.

A linear composite of four self-disclosure factors (depth, positiveness, honesty, and amount) contributed sequential and unique variance to loneliness. The intended disclosure factor was not significant. Likewise, a linear composite of three general disclosiveness factors (positiveness, honesty, and amount) contributed sequential and unique variance to loneliness. The depth and intended disclosure factors were not significant.

A follow-up stepwise regression including all disclosure and disclosiveness factors was conducted to determine the best unique (variance) predictors.
A four-variable model accounted for over 15% of the variance in loneliness.
A model consisting of positive disclosiveness, honesty of disclosiveness,
depth of self-disclosure, and amount of self-disclosure can be employed to
predict some of an individual's loneliness. This model would indicate that
more lonely people have less positive disclosive tendancies and less honest
disclosive predispositions with people in general than do nonlonely people.
Further, more lonely individuals may exhibit less amount of self-disclosure
and less depth of self-disclosure to parents than do nonlonely individuals.
Though the variance accounted for in the model was low, greater reliability
in measurement would have probably raised the amount of variance accounted
for in loneliness scores.

Examining quadratic and cubic relationships, depth of self-disclosure and disclosiveness displayed nonlinear relationships with loneliness. This finding may suggest that varying levels of an individual's disclosure to parents and depth of an individual's disclosiveness to people in general predict the individual's level of loneliness in a curvelinear fashion. For example, loneliness appears to level off or even increase slightly at a moderately high level of self-disclosure depth with parents, before continuing to decrease at a high depth level. However, loneliness appears to level-off at the moderately high and high levels of general disclosiveness depth with others (See Table 2).

In all child-parent combinations, results indicated that more loneliness was significant and negatively related to the child's self-disclosure. This relationship of loneliness to disclosure was most pronounced in daughter-father pair than in the son-mother pair, which was more pronounced than in the son-father relationship. The daughter-mother pair also produced a higher association between loneliness and the child's disclosure than did the son-father pair. One interesting finding was that disclosure to fathers is much less relevant to the sons' loneliness than is the daughters' disclosure to either father or mother.

In sum, the results tended to reconfirm and extend past research supporting the relationships among loneliness, disclosure, and disclosiveness.



In general, individuals appeared to have lower self-disclosure to their parents, while nonlonely individuals appeared to exhibit higher selfdisclosure to their parents. This trend may not be as strong in the sonfather pair, and may be curvelinear in regard to the depth of the child's disclosure. The results also appear to extend past research on selfdisclosure, self-concept, and loneliness. For example, a child may gain a higher self-concept (to the extent that self-concept and loneliness are related) through self-disclosure with his/her parent. In post adolescence, the individual apparently continues some disclosure to parents, and the individual tends to disclose to others in general (disclosiveness). Consequently, the individual may not feel as lonely. On the other hand, lack of self-disclosure in child-parent relationships may lead to postadolescence disclosure patterns that increase feelings of loneliness in the individual. Though the variances in these model were low in magnitude, the results still appear to indicate a meaningful relationship between an individual's feeling of loneliness and his/her disclosure to parents and his/her tendency to disclose to other people in general.

NOTES

According to Johnson, self-disclosure is appropriate when: (1) It is of a random or isolated act but rather is part of an ongoing relationship, (2) It is reciprocated, (3) It concerns what is going on within and between persons in the present, (4) It creates a reasonable chance of improving the relationship, (5) account is taken of the effect it will have upon the other person, (6) It is speeded up in a crisis in the relationship, and (7) It gradually moves to a deeper level.



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TABLE 1

CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS AMONG LONELINESS,

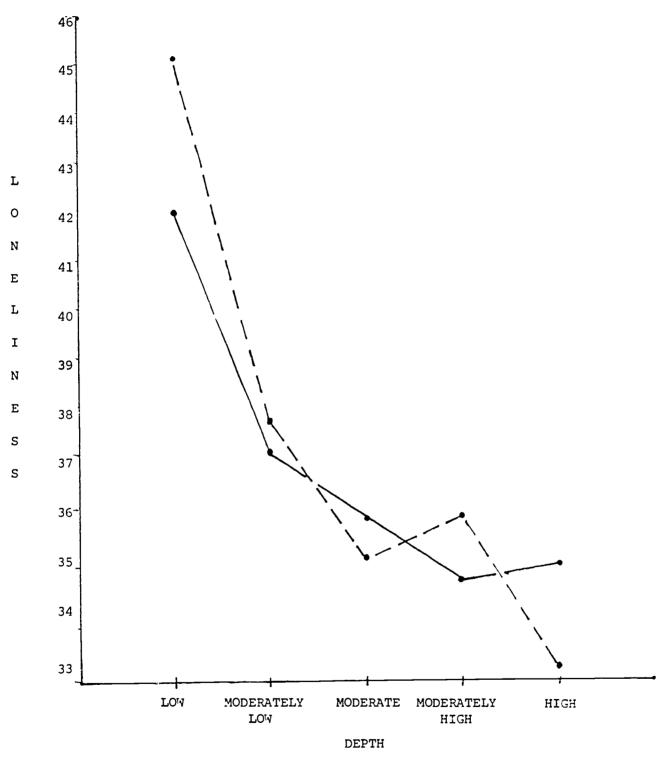
GENERAL DISCLOSIVENESS, AND SELF-DISCLOSURE FACTORS

		Loneliness	ì	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Dis	closiveness									
1.	Intent	 13*								
2.	Amount	20*	•02							
3.	Positiveness	30*	•22*	*80						
4.	Depth	14*	.18*	.39*	•13*					
5.	Honesty	25*	.31*	•14*	.34*	. 34*				
Dis	closure									
b •	Intent	14*	.61*	•08*	.24*	•20*	•28*			
7.	Amount	20*	.01	•63*	•05	. 23*	•07	*80		
8.	Positiveness	22*	•19*	•14*	.76*	•14*	•29*	•19*	•07	
9.	Depth	23*	.14*	•36*	.12*	.44*	.21*	•21*	•48*	•10*
10.	Honesty	20*	•29*	•09*	•26*	•20*	•69*	.31*	.12*	.23* .33*

^{*}Significant, p < .05, n = 595

PLOT OF LONELINESS MEANS* FOR FIVE

LEVELS OF SELF-DISCLOSURE DEPTH AND DISCLOSIVENESS DEPTH



--DEPTH OF SELF-DISCLOSURE
--DEPTH OF DISCLOSIVENESS

*Respondents were leveled into 5 groups based on disclosure and disclosiveness depth scores. Moderates consisted of respondents within \$\frac{1}{2}\$ standard deviation on either side of the mean. Remaining groups Consisted of respondents within successive standard deviations on either side of the moderates.



TABLE 3

MULTIPLE CORRELATIONS* OF COMBINED SELF-DISCLOSURE

FACTORS WITH LONELINESS FOR CHILD-PARENT PAIRINGS

	Son	Daughters
	(Male Respondent)	(Female respondent)
Father	28ab	44a
(male guardian)	(n=157)	(n=132)
Mother	 38a	41b
(female guardian)	(n-173)	(n=133)
	R's From Stepwise Regre	ssion Models**
	Son	Daughters
	(Male Respondent)	(Female Respondent)
Father	26ab	43a
(male guardian)	(n=157)	(n=132)
Mother	37a	40b
(female guardian)	(n=173)	(n=133)

^{*}All R's significant, p<.05



^{**}R's with same subscript significantly different, z>1.96